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Letter dated 8 November 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to bring to your attention the enclosed statement which was issued on 7 November 1996 following the special meeting of European Union Development and Humanitarian Aid Ministers on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

I should be grateful if you could have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly and of the Security Council.

(Signed) John H. F. CAMPBELL
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

[Original: English and French]

Press statement issued following the special meeting of European Union Development and Humanitarian Aid Ministers, Brussels, 7 November 1996

A special meeting of European Union Development and Humanitarian Aid Ministers was held at Brussels on 7 November 1996 to examine recent developments in the Great Lakes region and to discuss the humanitarian situation of refugees and displaced people in eastern Zaire, and ways and means to bring about an easing of the humanitarian crisis and an enhancement of the prospects for a sustainable solution. The meeting was chaired by the Minister of State, Joan Burton T.D., of Ireland, and was attended by development and humanitarian Ministers or representatives from all European Union member States. The Commission was represented by Mrs. Emma Bonino and Prof. J. Pinheiro.

Commissioner Pinheiro made a short general statement on the situation facing the Great Lakes region and Commissioner Bonino briefed the Ministers on the humanitarian response of the Commission to the crisis to date and presented a plan of action, which will be examined immediately and in more detail in the competent committee on humanitarian aid. Commissioner Bonino emphasized the urgency of immediate intervention to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced people and presented ideas concerning future action. The Special Envoy of the European Union to the Great Lakes region, Mr. Ajello, briefed the meeting on the current complex situation in the region. Mr. Akashi, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Mrs. Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Mr. Graisse, Assistant Executive Director of the World Food Programme, and Mr. De Courtin, Director of Operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross, also gave briefings on the humanitarian situation in the region.

The meeting reaffirmed the European Union's deep concern at the deteriorating situation in eastern Zaire and the threat posed to peace and stability in the entire Great Lakes region. It reaffirmed the Union's determination and commitment to do everything in its power to help and to assist immediately vulnerable people, refugees and displaced persons in eastern Zaire, in averting further human tragedy there and in avoiding a potentially catastrophic humanitarian disaster in the region. The meeting also reiterated the view of the Union that the complex problems at issue could only be resolved through early and substantive dialogue, and called again on all parties concerned, including in particular Zaire and Rwanda, to begin such a process as soon as possible. The meeting acknowledged the strong interconnection between the immediate humanitarian requirements and the broader political issues underlying the conflict and the need to address them in a comprehensive way.

In that regard, the meeting expressed full support for the efforts of the United Nations regional leaders and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the conflict and

reaffirmed the Union's commitment to assist in every way possible. It welcomed the outcome of the Nairobi summit of heads of State of the region on 5 November 1996. The meeting endorsed the call by the heads of State in their press statement for an immediate ceasefire, which should be strictly observed to enable the intensification of diplomatic efforts to achieve lasting peace. The meeting shared the view expressed by the regional heads of State concerning the importance of the territorial integrity of Zaire, in accordance with the OAU charter and, in particular, the Cairo Declaration of 1964, an end to cross-border incursion and the inalienable rights of all people, including those of citizenship and nationality. The meeting welcomed the call by the heads of State for the immediate setting up of safe corridors and temporary sanctuaries inside Zaire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and the repatriation of refugees and noted their request in that regard to the Security Council for the deployment of a "neutral force". The meeting also welcomed the call by the heads of State for the intensification of efforts towards voluntary repatriation of refugees to Rwanda and the "implementation of the long-standing decision to separate the intimidators and bona fide refugees". The meeting also underlined the importance of support for the democratic process in Zaire.

The meeting noted that special arrangements were urgently required in the short term to ensure a stable security situation in eastern Zaire, to facilitate both the necessary humanitarian tasks and the process of dialogue. It noted that efforts to that end were being pursued by the Security Council, taking into account recent proposals which had been made. The French and Spanish Ministers briefed the meeting on their proposal in that regard for a temporary force for strictly humanitarian purposes in order to enable the delivery of aid to the populations concerned.

In that context, the meeting recalled the conclusions of the European Council held at Florence, on 21 and 22 June 1996, which indicated that the Council "continues to support the convening of an international conference under the joint auspices of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity in order to address, within a global approach, the root causes of the crises and to ensure respect for commitments".

The meeting expressed its warm appreciation of the efforts of the Special Envoy of the European Union in seeking, on behalf of EU, to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the conflict and to address the immediate humanitarian requirements, and welcomed the fact that Mr. Ajello would be continuing his work in the region in that regard. It looked forward to close coordination between him and the newly appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ambassador Raymond Chrétien.

The meeting agreed to send immediately a special mission of development Ministers from Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, together with Commissioner Bonino, to make an assessment of the humanitarian situation and to identify ways and means to speed up humanitarian assistance. The Special Envoy of the European Union will also participate in the mission. The conclusions of the mission will be transmitted urgently to the General Affairs Council.

The meeting recalled the Union's commitment to promote the voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin. It strongly underlined the need to

ensure safe and protected humanitarian corridors in order to facilitate the delivery of immediate relief supplies to the victims of the crisis where they are, as well as the voluntary safe and dignified return of refugees to their countries of origin. The need for support for development efforts as well as for strengthening the legal system, notably within Rwanda, to facilitate the integration of returned refugees was also noted.

The meeting agreed on the need to work in a coordinated manner with international humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations to ensure an effective humanitarian response to the crisis and underlined the coordinating role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in the United Nations system. It noted the resource needs of the humanitarian agencies and agreed on the importance of ensuring that aid resources were made available for agreed priorities as a matter of urgency. The meeting called on all parties in the region to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of all international humanitarian aid personnel.

Since the beginning of the crisis in the Great Lakes region in 1994, the European Community and its member States have provided in the order of 755 million ecus in humanitarian aid. At the meeting, the humanitarian agencies indicated that they would shortly be in a position to approach the Community and the member States regarding precise requirements and needs. It was agreed that the most urgent consideration would be given to those appeals.

Ministers emphasized that the scale of the current humanitarian crisis in the Great Lakes region called for a coherent and concerted international response. It was reaffirmed that the Union would play its full part in that task.